DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 856 TM 011 238

AUTHOR Pedrini, D. T.; Pedrini, B. C.
TITLE The GRE Subject Test in Psychology.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Entrance Examinations; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Test Coaching; Test Wiseness
IDENTIFIERS *Graduate Record Examinations; Practice Tests

ABSTRACT

Specific and detailed instructions to implement an environmental engineering approach to the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Subject Test for Psychology are outlined. Focus is on helping students prepare for this test. Some universities use the GRE as a measure of achievement and aptitude and as a criterion test. In truth, such a test does not measure learning, but does measure test performance. Hence, results can be improved via reading and study techniques. Key materials needed for test preparation include practice tests and introductory psychology texts. Skills in which test candidates can improve their test performance include awareness of the certainty of the correctness of test responses and item analysis of incorrect answers and associated study methods. A list of publishers of practice tests and other materials is appended. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED292856

The GRE Subject Test in Psychology

D. T. Pedrini and B. C. Pedrini

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Omaha, NE 68182-0274

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.T. PEDRINI

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running head: GRE SUBJECT TEST

TM 011 238

Abstract

Some universities place importance upon the GRE Subject Test in Psychology. They use it as an achievement test, an aptitude test, or as a criterion test. In truth, "as every psychologist knows" (shades of Boring), such a test does not measure learning, but does measure performance. You can improve your performance on such a Psychology Test with reading and study techniques. The key materials needed are practice tests (publishers are listed) and introductory texts. This paper includes specific and detailed instructions on "what" and "how" (in this instance, the touchstones of environmental engineering, if not of science).

Studying for the GRE Subject Test in Psycholgy

The Educational Testing Service develops and administers the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). The purpose of this paper is to help students prepare for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology

A GRE Subject Test is an achievement test which allegedly measures what a person has learned in the area, e.g., Psychology. In truth, what is measured is test performance.

A GRE Subject Test is used as an aptitude test which allegedly measures a person's potential for further learning in the area, e.g., Psychology. In truth, what is measured is test performance.

A GRE Subject Test is used as a criterion test which allegedly measures a person's successful or unsuccessful completion of the area, e.g., Psychology. In truth, what is measured is test performance.

A GRE Subject Test may be helpful in determining how much background a student has in the area as measured by multiple-choice test items. For example, the GRE Subject Test in Psychology gives a total score, and subscores in experimental psychology and in social psychology. The questions allegedly cover a rather comprehensive undergraduate major. In truth, what is measured is test performance.

In psychology, the introductory course (typically one-semester) uses a survey approach. In other words, practically the entire field of psychology is surveyed in the first-semester book. This presents a wonderful opportunity in which to study for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology. This same principle would

prevail for any subject which surveys its entire field in one or two semesters. What we will focus on is how to improve performance on the GRE Subject Test in Psychology.

What materials are needed? Firstly, obtain practice subject-matter tests (e.g., see Arco, Barron's, GRE, Monarch, National Learning, Research & Education) in Psychology. These practice tests are important for error analyses. It would be wise to have various publisher sources for adequate sampling analyses. Not all Psychology Tests have the same emphases. You may be able to obtain such samples from other students or from libraries. If not, consult various bookstores and tell them what you want.

Secondly, obtain various introductory psychology texts. Ideally, they should be newer editions of older texts, or texts that are 2- to 4-years-old. Texts that continue to be published are especially useful in the writing of test items, since they had and have an impact on the study of psychology. Some new texts, in a few years, develop excellent markets and also need consideration.

It is horrendous what we expect introductory psychology students to assimilate in one semester. The tomes ought to be studied for two semesters as they used to be studied years ago. The teachers today "outline" for the students, "summarize" for the students, and generally do not expect the students to know the minutiae. But, those tomes are excellent for the study of the GRE Subject Test. Those tomes are detailed and comprehensive. Some of them are available in libraries, especially college libraries.

Or, ask your teachers or teacher-assistants, they may have some available. It would be wise to have four to six different introductory texts for study purposes.

Thirdly, obtain answer sheets and No. 2 pencils with erasers, and have a timepiece available. Fourthly, obtain study guides, especially test-item files for introductory texts, if possible. This fourth suggestion is optional and not necessary, but it could be helpful.

How much time will be required to study for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology? That is difficult to answer for there are many vagaries. But a recommendation is to prepare for that test as you would prepare for a three-credit, one-semester course (including time in class). From a professor's viewpoint (not necessarily a student's) allot about 200 hours.

Let us begin. Sit in a quiet place (a library perhaps) that is well suited to test-taking and take two (not one, but two) practice tests (time the test-taking). This conditions you to take longer tests, and this gives you a better sampling of your performance. The sampling is especially enhanced if you take one Psychology Test from each of two different publishers (e.g., from Arco, Barron's, GRE, Monarch, National Learning, Research & Education).

Do not answer on the test booklet. Answer on answer sheets. Let us trifurcate your responses. Were you relatively certain of your answer? Were you conjectural as to your answer? Were you

unaware of a plausible answer and just guessing? This latter category is good to note on your answer sheets, in the practice tests only. Make some indication on the answer sheet when you blatantly guess. Some persons should guess and some should not guess. Some persons should guess in certain areas and not guess in others. You will be able to determine a reasonable guessing style for yourself. Some tests do not correct for guessing, but the GRE Subject Tests do. The correction formula is usually right minus one-fourth wrong (R - W/4) for a five-alternative multiple-choice item; or right minus one-third wrong (R - W/3) for a four-alternative multiple-choice item. The general formula is R - W/c-1. Usually, if you can definitely rule out at least one answer (in A through E, or in A through D), it is worth guessing. But you can become more definitive as to your style if you note blatant guessing on the answer sheets of the practice tests.

After two Psychology Tests have been taken, score your answers as correct or incorrect. Do an item analysis of the incorrect ones, only. Namely, classify the incorrect items according to the chapter headings of one of your introductory texts. Of course, the texts vary in chapter headings, but this is not a problem for our purposes. Use the same chapter headings, each time you classify the incorrect answers, e.g., perception, conditioning and learning, etc. Some items may fit under two chapters and you may wish to include them under each chapter, or you may wish to consider the major emphasis exclusively. Then

total the number of items missed within chapter subject-matter areas. It should become obvious wherein you could profit most. Consider the chapter wherein you have the largest number of errors. Study that chapter in the four to six introductory texts. Study (remember "fourthly" mentioned above) the test-item files (if you have them, they are not necessary but they are efficient) for that chapter. In studying (as contrasted to being examined with) test items, never read the given and then the four or five choices. Circle the correct choice, then read the given, then read the correct choice, only. You do not wish to remember incorrect answers.

Then, in terms of your item analysis, take the chapter with the second largest number of errors, and repeat the above. Then, take the chapter with the third largest number of errors, etc.

Concentrate on the chapters wherein you have large numbers of errors, only. You probably do not have enough time to concentrate on all chapters. Therefore, concentrate your reading and studying on chapters wherein you will profit most. The above is done on the basis of two practice tests of a GRE Subject Test, e.g., Psychology.

Then take two more practice tests (from different publishers), recording blatant guessing, etc. By the way, for blatant guessing, do an item analysis, also. Should you or shouldn't you blatantly guess? Do you have enough data to specify areas (chapter subject matter)? For example, could you profit from

guessing in one area (biological bases of behavior), but not in another (psychopathology)? You may know more than you believed. In any case, be guided by the data analyses.

Continue with the procedures until you complete all the Psychology Tests available to you (or until you run out of time). Of course, the error analysis results will change with regard to chapters. One, you are changing because of reading and study time. Your initial weaknesses may no longer be weaknesses and could even become strengths. Two, the sampling may vary. Not all Tests have the same emphases. Consider, just briefly, some of the variations in chapters and subchapters in your four to six books. But, this is not a problem for you, continue self-testing (two Psychology Tests at one sitting) and reading/studying as indicated above.

As a final study technique, you may wish to study the test items per se (from Arco, Barron's, GRE, Monarch, National Learning, Research & Education). Remember, circle the correct answer, read the given, and then read the correct answer. Practice by reading the correct question-answer items. Going through item after item will reinforce the subject matter of the chapters. For this final kind of studying (if you have enough time, this is also an option), you should read all the question-answer items for each chapter. We would not recommend skipping any chapters in this phase. After all, you probably had some errors in each area, which is to be expected.

What is measured is test performance. You can improve your test performance. The senior author has taught the above techniques, gratis, for over thirty years. They work beautifully since they follow basic principles of conditioning and learning. Some persons sell services related to GRE Subject Tests. They could help, but the above recommended techniques are probably all that you will need. Good studying for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology. Let us know whether you succeeded or not. We may be able to help you further, if you do not.

References

Arco Books
Published by Prentice Hall Press
A Division of Simon & Schuster
Gulf & Western Bldg.
One Gulf & Western Plaza
New York, NY 10023

Barron's Educational Series
113 Crossways Park Dr.
Woodbury, NY 11797

Boring, E. G. (1950). A history of experimental psychology (2nd ed.). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts. See p. 134.

GRE: Graduate Record Examinations
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08541-6014

Monarch Press
A Simon & Schuster Division of Gulf & Western
Simon & Schuster Bldg.
1230 Ave. of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

or

Gulf & Western Bldg.
One Gulf & Western Plaza
New York, NY 10023

National Learning
Delaney Books
212 Michael Dr.
Syosset, NY 11791

Research & Education Association
505 Eighth Ave.
New York, NY 10018